



**2024 Christmas Message from Art Mathews
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"None of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful." – Mother Teresa

As has become my practice in my years with the Salvation Army I'm sending to you some thoughts for the Christmas season. Normally, I would take the time to acknowledge the great partnerships we experience both internally and externally, the hard work that all of our staff do including frontline, support staff, management and senior management, as well as my thanks to the people we support for the impacts they have on our lives, and to their families for the privilege of working with their sons and daughters and becoming better people because we are able to help people become better. All of the above remains true, and for that I am very thankful, however, the events over the past year are inspiring me to send a different message.

During this past 12 to 18 months we've seen a marked increase in a number of disturbing trends in the world. Hate crimes have increased both in their number and in the openness with which they occur. Elements of society are becoming bolder with their overt discrimination against people because they're different - whether it be because of their race, their faith, their abilities, their orientation, their housing status or their gender identity. In many instances public discourse has become less about an exchange of ideas and philosophies that leads to the betterment of society and more about who-can-bully-who into submission. Wars have increased and the world is becoming more polarized and seemingly more willing to engage in armed conflict to settle differences. The question becomes not should we react, or can we react to make things better, but **how** do we react to these disturbing trends in order to counteract their influence?

For me, the answer is not easy and yet it is. I readily acknowledge that my actions alone, other than my prayers, will not have a profound impact on the negativity so rampant in the world today. So, I want to invoke three main ideas - intentionality, synergy and spreading impact. *Intentionality* is all about deciding to act in a manner that in some small portion fights against these disturbing trends. This is the first step in making inroads on the negativity in society. The second factor is *synergy*. As Aristotle says, "the whole is not the same as the sum of the parts". The concept that acting **together** for the greater good will have a greater impact than working alone is not a new concept but is profoundly applicable to today. The last key to action is *spreading impact*. This is the belief that goodness inspires others to do good. Whether you want to frame it as success breeds success, positivity inspires positivity or kindness begets kindness, the impact of our actions, like ripples in a pond, spread their influence and impact on a broader and broader scale.

So my Christmas message this year is a challenge. I challenge everybody to be active and intentional in their pursuit of goodness and kindness. Look around you and think about what it is that you can do to make a positive difference at this moment. On a small scale this can be as simple as giving some change to somebody who's experiencing homelessness, holding the door open for somebody in need and being gracious in your greeting, and paying for the Timmies' order of the person behind you in the drive through in order to shed a little positive light on their day. On a larger scale supporting our local food banks, volunteering at community resources supporting individuals who are disadvantaged within society, donating your money and time to the many worthy causes that impact society all come to mind. The key is to do something - large and small - to influence society as a whole. My Christmas commitment to you (and myself) is that I will endeavour to do something good for somebody every single day. This will be reflected in increasing my payroll donations to various charities, in how I spend my time outside of work, and, in large part, reflected in how I interact with my world day-to-day. While my actions alone make small changes I go back to my commentary about the spreading influence and the cumulative effect all of us working together will have on society as a whole.

I'm sorry if this comes off as being "preachy", but I believe it's time to stand up even more than I do now and intentionally make a difference beyond what I'm currently doing. My hope is that this inspires others to do the same and truly express the cumulative power of collective kindness.

Many thanks and God Bless you



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